

JOYCE, DERRIDA, LACAN, AND THE TRAUMA OF HISTORY

Reading, narrative and postcolonialism

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CHAPTER I

The stolen birthright: the mimesis of original loss

Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*

This book argues the cultural-historical importance of James Joyce's Irish modernity. His projection of a traumatized discursivity encapsulating the life-in-death of Irish experience, his syncretic manner of representation, his paradoxical approach to Irish nationalism, his complex attitude to language and cultural memory anticipate insights which we are only beginning to grasp at the end of the century. Joyce, an Irish Catholic born in 1882, grappled with the realities of colonial experience and the hegemony of the English language; and this struggle entailed an engagement with the evaporation of the presence of the material, and the devaluation or dissolution of art and truth – problems besetting contemporary culture. Not surprisingly, Joyce's writing has had an informative impact on contemporary theory: Joyce's presence in the texts of Derrida, Lacan, and Slavoj Žižek is pronounced; and the simplest way of describing this book is as a study in the informative presence of what Freud called the "death instinct," and what I see as the peculiarly traumatizing and uncanny effect of Irish historical experience in the rivalry for truth of three disciplines: deconstructive philosophy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Joycean Irish modernist literature. My claim will be that, where the "death instinct" undermines any title to full truth, Joyce's encrypting of the experience of destitution in the material location of his text opens up a new, intersubjective realm of communication which may help to make it possible to work out the heritage of the past and transform the ghostly uncanniness of the "death instinct" into full discourse.

My argument, which does not require the reader's specialist know-

ledge of either Joyce or poststructuralist theory, has several implications. It unsettles the conventional distinction between theory and literature in showing that literature may be a form of *theoria* (this seems especially important in postcolonial studies struggling with western theories); it historicizes poststructuralist theory as itself a product of a certain resistance against the trauma of history; and finally, it argues for a new understanding of reading which emphasizes the reader's responsibility to listen beyond the conventional systems of sign and structure, and claims the ethical obligation to hear the pain which may not have been expressed in so many words.

This new perspective is made possible by the theoretical groundwork of Jean-François Lyotard, who conceptualizes the atrocity of the Holocaust as a discursive deadlock in which language and narrative representation are no longer able to express the horror or import of the experience. The concept of discursive trauma, elaborated in this chapter, is central to my argument. It entails a revision of our notion of subjectivity. Instead of the split subject of psychoanalysis with an unconscious preceding discourse and history, Lyotard's perspective allows us to understand Joyce's dramatic materialization, or literalization, of the possibility of failure of symbolization itself as a "death-in-life of discourse," or an unconscious *within* history and discourse which adds a psychic dimension to textuality. It should be noted that this study does not present an analysis of Joyce's psyche, but of the texture of his discourse.

Such a revision has radical consequences. When we re-conceptualize the notion of the subject-in-language to include the constitutive instability which comes from placing an unconscious inside the subject rather than outside or before it, we must also redefine the discourses of subjectivity such as literature or history. What is "literature" or "history" after the break-up of being and the displacement of colonialism which forces the subjected self to breach "the great divide" and relocate itself in space, time, or language? Separated from an original mooring, a postcolonial subject can only mourn the gap that divides himself or herself from the possibility of interiority and self-presence that might have been had history been different. In the case of an Irish writer, growing up with English as his first language, the aspiring artist is forced to allude allegorically, and in the *sermo patris* of the oppressor's language, to what can never be voiced with immediacy: the loss of a natural relationship to language, the lack of interiority of discourse and coherent selfhood. In his texts, Joyce gave material presence to that nothingness

which Adorno and Lyotard (in different ways) would later locate in World War II. Joyce's texts enshrine the inexpressed and inexpressible experience of discursive death-in-life, long before the poems of Celan. By means of a detailed mapping of the informative presence of discursive trauma in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I hope to outline the concept sufficiently to lend it conceptual force in postcolonial studies, and to illustrate its radical effect on our understanding of "literature," "representation," "text," or "reader."

This introduction, which lays out the parameters of the concept of discursive trauma, is followed, in chapter 2, by a reading of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* which shows the presence of discursive trauma in seemingly traditional novelistic representation and draws out its effects on our understanding of representation. Since trauma sets up a progressive dialectic of repetition-with-a-difference, subsequent readings of later works will demonstrate how Joyce, with ever-increasing self-consciousness, strove to gain mastery over the informative presence of discursive trauma in his texts. I chose "Cyclops" and "Penelope" because these episodes are central to the postcolonial and feminist debates about Joyce; and my reading of "Penelope" argues that Joyce's attitude to gender cannot be divorced from his Irish heritage. It is best seen as a defensive, and paradoxically Irish, strategy of dealing with the trauma of Irishness. Thus this book also offers a contribution to the discussion of gender in Joyce's works. After these readings, I shall turn towards Lacan and Derrida, to suggest that their controversy about Poe's "The Purloined Letter" is re-enacted in their perspective on Joyce, and that they remain locked in opposition because they fail to accept the possibility of the death of discourse that Joyce lived. My discussion concludes with an attempt to articulate the different notions of "materiality" at work in Joyce, Derrida, and Lacan because Joyce's materialization of the spectre of nothingness of colonial experience in *Finnegans Wake* is different from Derrida's "writing" or Lacan's "materiality of the letter." Their notions shore up the full acceptance of the reductiveness of colonial experience which stereotypes its subjects as pure body. This book does not present a survey of the French reception of Joyce, which is available elsewhere.¹

My Joycean reader will find that he or she will have to engage more theory than is customary in Joyce criticism, whereas the theorist will be

¹ See Geert Lernout's *The French Joyce* (University of Michigan Press, 1990), for those factual details which this study does not supply.

exposed to detailed readings of a literary text. This is both unavoidable and deliberate. That the importance of Joyce in the twentieth century is not limited to the realm of the aesthetic can only be demonstrated by going outside it. If theory maintains its discursive superiority by means of a repression of the affective address of the literary text and its intersubjective appeal, and in doing so kills its ethical impact, this can only be countered by reading. Thus each group of readers will be exposed to unfamiliar material.

The epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which Joyce gave his autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is commonly read as a reference to the myth of Daedalus and the escape from the labyrinth. If we understand the words "*Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*" [And he applied his mind to obscure arts] as bearing on the author's artistic intention rather than on that of the protagonist, and also note that Joyce stopped short of the words "*naturamque novat*" [and he renewed nature], a different message emerges. The epigraph may be a sign to the reader that what follows presents a transformatively novel notion of textual practice deriving from the unknown, occult, or the unconscious [*ignotas artes*]. Perhaps we should see Joyce not only as a wordsmith like the great artificer Daedalus, but also compare him to another artist figure in Ovid's collection of stories, the raped and muted Philomel who managed to communicate by indirect means – color and texture – a story which could not be told in words. Philomel's strategic shift seems resonant in relation to James Joyce. Deprived of a sense of linguistic interiority because history had ousted the use of the "mother tongue," he had to resort to "obscure arts." Although Gaelic was all but extinct at the time Joyce was born, and although Joyce was raised as a native speaker of English, his life and his works nevertheless trace the symbolic event of the entry into language as a disruptive and violently fracturing moment splitting body from discourse and initiating an endlessly repeated attempt at arriving at a signification of itself. In other words, Joyce's work demonstrates an attitude to language which highlights the presence of a void or a gap opening up within representation and memory. Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's autobiographical *alter ego*, speaking on the subject of his alienated relationship to the English language in contrast to that of his English master, notes his own ambivalent sense of its simultaneous "familiarity" and "foreignness." "His language, *so familiar and so foreign*, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My *voice* holds them at bay. My *soul* frets in the shadow of his language."² Joyce

worked in that split, and in that affective gap, writing in an English which, in its defamiliarization and slips of the tongue (*lapsus linguae*) evokes the continuous spectral presence of what, for want of a better image, we may denote as the felt presence of the lapsing of the mother tongue.³ Moreover, he especially turned his attention to the physical or material aspects of language, because he located his resistant Irish “soul” in his body, his “voice.”

In a sequence of works, beginning with the portraits of the melancholic “paralysis” or “hemiplegia of the soul” of Irish-urban existence in *Dubliners*, Joyce increasingly opened the void gaping between the “foreign” and the “familiar” to end up giving the materialization of that void a local habitation and a name in *Finnegans Wake*, published on the eve of World War II, which inscribes the darkness and dislocation of discursive death as a blot upon the screen of history. I use the word blot, because *Finnegans Wake* is both intensely funny and utterly unreadable in conventional narrative terms. But what seems important is not just that Joyce published an unreadable work. The point I want to make rests on the fact that this unreadable text, notwithstanding its unreadability, or perhaps precisely owing to its hermetic nature, became part of the cultural history of western Europe as a recognized masterpiece. The event of its publication also got Joyce’s photograph on the front cover of *Time* magazine. Thus the material existence of this enshrined instance of discursive death confirmed the transformation of James Joyce the louse-eaten, starved, and possibly syphilitic Irish exile into “Joyce the genius,” the internationally famous modernist author residing in Paris, permanently inscribed in the book of culture. Joyce at once demonstrates the always already modern condition of Irishness and turns it into the emblem of global culture.

Joyce achieved this by inventing a curiously hybrid and covertly double strategy of storytelling in the oppressor’s language, which unweaves its very texture as it narrates. At first sight, Joyce’s earlier works seems to present a recognizable world. On closer inspection, Joyce’s method of weaving his texts – looping, unlooping, nodding, disnodding –

² *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 189. Hereafter *P* and cited by page number.

³ I wish to emphasize that “the lapsing of the mother tongue” features as an image, a metaphor or *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* (see chapter 1) to fill in the gap in history left by the traumatic nature of its occurrence. To support my suggestion, I wish to point to Thomas Kinsella’s words in “The Irish Writer,” “I simply recognize that I stand on one side of a great rift, and can feel the discontinuity in myself . . . The death of a language . . . is a calamity. And its effects are at work everywhere in the present.” *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 3, ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), p. 626.

focuses the reader's attention on an absence which defies representation and which highlights the inability to tell in one's "own" words. Writing in the English language, Joyce refused to identify with the structure of predication of language, and points us to the presence of an absence, a lacuna at the heart of his linguistic subjectivity. Instead of a story about the young Stephen Dedalus, we end up "reading" (experiencing) a texture which, like Philomel's web, indirectly betrays the muted violence of its occasion.

Philomel's story resonates in relation to Joyce in yet another way. Tereus's violation of the sanctity of his familiar bond in raping his sister-in-law initiates a series of events which blur the distinction between inside and outside, familiar and foreign, generation and consumption, ending in Procne's murder of her child, and the father's forced feasting on the flesh of his own son. This incestuous violence reminds me of Stephen Dedalus's fear of Ireland as the "old sow" eating her own children. An initial transgression sets up a pattern which keeps generating new violence – until the protagonists are delivered from the cycle of repetition through a metamorphosis. In Ovid they turn into birds. Not so in Joyce's works. Stephen's desire to fly away, his definition of his muse as a "birdgirl," the preoccupation with metempsychosis in *Ulysses*, the continual shapeshifting in *Finnegans Wake* may express the wish to end the chain of repetition and undo the history "which is to blame" as one of Joyce's characters puts it; but Joyce's universe does not allow of the magical transformation which Ovid granted his sufferers. Caught in the web of history, Joyce's characters as well as their author keep repeating the symptomatic expression of their condition to tell us, by indirect means, not about their deliverance but about the repressed historical condition which occasioned their imprisonment.

In this book, my intention is not only to demonstrate the peculiar nature of what I call Joyce's "mimesis of loss." I especially want to argue the effect on the reader of its unusual textuality. As a form of what Dori Laub and Daniel Podell call the "art of trauma,"⁴ Joyce's *œuvre* does not communicate meaning directly, but may generate meaning in receptive minds; in non-receptive minds it may set up a defensive impulse to contain the threat of the text and subject it to coherent interpretation. No other writer, other than Shakespeare, perhaps, has produced such markedly obsessive as well as contradictory responses in his audience. There are Joyce-adepts who virtually live *in* Joyce's work, trying to

⁴ "Art and Trauma," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 76 (1995), 992.

master it by finding the definitive answer to some seeming riddle; and Joyce scholarship has a history of exclusivist opposition reminiscent of Irish history itself. Indeed, Joyce has had a splitting effect on his readership. His idiosyncratic strategy of representation, put down in “double dye”⁵ just as Philomel wove her cloth in purple and white, has had a curiously divisive influence on its readers. Since its true “meaning,” the inexpressibility and pain of the trauma of its occasion, can at best only present an address which invites the reader “to become engaged in a dialogue of his own with the trauma,”⁶ readers aiming at uttering the whole truth about Joyce’s texts tend to pick up one of the two threads of its hybrid texture. Consequently, Joyce criticism is characterized by a number of ongoing debates in which his readers take radically oppositional, mutually exclusive stances: Joyce is feminist or anti-feminist; humanist or ironist, modernist or nationalist, political or apolitical, etc.

In retrospect, Joyce criticism enacts the effect of what, in the seventies and eighties, reductively following Barbara Johnson and Shoshana Felman, was labelled “the castration of truth as the truth of writing.” Here the term “castration” indicated the reader’s sense of lack and diminishment at never arriving at full mastery or a definitive interpretation. The important point to note, however, is that in their writings this effect was presented as a universal and transhistorical aspect of literary language. My claim here is that the instance of Joyce disrupts that ahistoric universalism. Certain forms of deconstructive criticism (I am not speaking of Johnson or Felman) may be acts of textual fetishism complicit with the symptom Joyce. If, rather than elevating it into truth itself, we accept “castration” especially in its wider cultural application made possible by Freud,⁷ a new but paradoxical historical perspective

⁵ *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 185.32. Hereafter *FW* and cited by page and line number. ⁶ Laub and Podell, “Art and Trauma,” 993.

⁷ The phantasy of castration is one of the primal mythic scenarios with which the small child puzzles out anatomical difference, and which has a different configuration in boys (generating anxiety about the possibility of loss) or girls (bringing the perception of a wrong suffered). To me, the importance of the concept resides in its wider application. In line with Freud in “Fetishism,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964–74), vol. 21, pp. 149–59, I take castration as a principle of cultural rather than just an individual psychosexual dynamic: “In later life a grown man may perhaps experience a similar panic when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger, and similar illogical consequences will ensue” (p. 153). Thus castration anxiety is a concept which may refer more generally to any threat to that which is central to our self-image; nor is castration anxiety permanently transcended in youth. See not only Jean Laplanche, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Hogarth Press, 1983), pp. 56–60, but also Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques II: Castration, Symbolisations* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

opens up. Joyce's perverse, fetishistic textuality dramatically enacts the presence of a condition that in its extremity questions a facile generalizing use of "the castration of truth as the truth of writing." Some forms of writing, the symptomatic "art of trauma" of a Joyce or a Celan, re-enact an occurrence of an act of violence which affects symbolization itself, and add to history a new dimension, a spot of numbness or failure of articulation, which becomes an unconscious *within* discourse, adding a psychic dimension to discourse. The muted suffering of colonial oppression may be understood as an actual historical event which inscribed the experience of death-in-life into history and subjectivity, encrypting an ontological void.

In other words, in Joyce, and through Joyce who materializes that death-in-life, we notice the advent of a new dimension to discourse. Lacan looked upon it as the confluence of the "real" (denoting the unrepresentable, death, sexuality, in contrast to the everyday use of the term which understands "real" as referring to the existent) with the symbolic of language. It was the example of Joyce which forced Lacan to this conclusion. He conceded that the historical example of Joyce's textuality upset his conceptualization of the relation between the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Until the late seventies, Lacan's "real" was located safely outside the symbolic and the imaginary – non-representable although the aim of representation, ahistorical while framing history: the transcendent still point of a turning world. Lacan's study of Joyce in the seventies confronted him with an instance of the binding of the real onto the symbolic and into history, as well as a dramatization of the usually repressed consciousness of the material determination of human subjectivity. It was this confrontation with the symptom Joyce (Joyce as the telling symptom of what supports human subjectivity) that led Lacan to revise his earlier schema, and admit that the symbolic, imaginary, and real, tied together in a Borromean knot – a fourth agent – may also be kept from psychotic fraying through a peculiar form of symptomatology. Thus a distinction is to be made between "Lacan" and the "late Lacan" of the mid-seventies onwards, who mentions his intense preoccupation with Joyce, for instance in his "Preface" to *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1976). The point seems especially relevant, because Slavoj Žižek's work on popular culture, e.g. Hitchcock's movies, resorts to Lacan's concepts of the "real" and the "symptom," without sufficiently indicating that his use of these concepts derives from the late Lacan working on Joyce. If the intrusion of the "real" describes a peculiarly modern form of horror, I

suggest that it is from Joyce's work that the model of that modernity implicitly derives. His texts provided a material location in which the hitherto unincarnated experience of death-in-life found a living habitation and a name.

Central in all this is that Joyce's encryption of an ontological void (or discursive death-in-life) opened up an extra-communicative but non-articulable dimension *within* discourse, making it possible to honour the "presence" of the non-articulated "story" that cannot be told in so many words – the "story" of the oppressed, the muted, the ignored. Moreover, Joyce's historical example re-aligns the place of poststructuralist theory in current postcolonial studies. Hence this book hopes to refine Homi K. Bhabha's claim that postcolonial writing "occupies that space of double inscription, hallowed – no, hollowed" by Jacques Derrida.⁸ I propose that the theoretical insights of Derrida and Lacan which have proven so useful in postcolonial studies, are best understood through the struggle for subjectivity of the Irish writer James Joyce. His linguistic materialism "hollowed" the supplementary location which nestles the truth of their concepts – from "dissemination" to the "two deaths." Derrida's writing is littered with his debt to Joyce ("nothing but a reading of *Finnegans Wake*"⁹), while the later Lacan who speaks of woman as symptom and Joyce as "symptôme"/"sinthome" and grapples with the place and definition of the death-drive, is also the Lacan currently prominent in cultural studies and postcolonial criticism. My intention is not to demonstrate the applicability of Derrida or Lacan to Joyce. I argue that their abstract concepts have a concretely embodied textual precursor in Joyce's complex textuality. It was Joyce's text which made their ideas possible, so to speak, by providing textual-material collateral. In other words, if, as Bhabha claims, Derrida occupies the space "hollowed" by Heidegger's revision of western metaphysics, his precursor Joyce already occupied the conceptual space hollowed by the historical condition of colonial rule. Thus the affinity between Derrida and Joyce solicits a query with regard to the historical provenance of philosophy's revision of metaphysics and the

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 108. Bhabha quotes from *Dissemination*: "whenever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke . . . [this] double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts. This displacement does not take place, has not taken place once as an *event*. It does not occupy a simple place. It does not take place *in* writing. This dislocation (is what) writes/is written." (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson [University of Chicago Press, 1981], p. 193).

⁹ *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 99, my translation. Derrida also used a passage from *A Portrait of the Artist* as epigraph.

postulate of an *arche*-dimensionality. Is the history of philosophy not also influenced by the lived experience of the embodied and suffering historical subject whose alienation hollows the experiential need, and conceptual possibility, of thinking from the place of this originary presence of absence? It has often been remarked that the revision of western thought coincided historically with the rise of women; perhaps we should also note that it coincided with the end of colonial expansion.

The emphasis on such a foundational role and such historical precedence of a literary text to theoretical concepts is not just intended to make these theories less controversial tools in postcolonial studies. In undoing theory's aloof transcendence as a pure metalanguage, and tracing its debt to the lived struggle of the postcolonial situation, I also turn theory into a form of literature.¹⁰ I find that important, because I want to reclaim the importance of literature as a socially necessary source of knowledge, especially in its *affective demand* to witness literature's occasion.

What do I mean by the "affective demand to witness"? Here Adorno's point is crucial: "We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain to this very day unbroken."¹¹ Just as Tereus's violence keeps generating new acts of transgression, the wounds of the past will remain active and spoil the present, unless we heal them through mourning. We must become conscious, accept the past, and find the words to voice and feel the desolation it occasions. Coming to terms with the causes of a past which keeps haunting us, as it still does in Northern Ireland, Albania, or Rwanda, depends upon an imaginative act of witnessing sympathy as well as the reorientation of subjectivity. While reading literature cannot take the place of the work of mourning imposed by history, reading the "art of trauma" may engage the reader in a dialogue with that trauma which might open him or her up to begin to acknowledge its hitherto repressed presence. Thus literature may help the reader to bracket

¹⁰ See also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 173, where they argue that "political orientations and experimental formations . . . deliberately designed to counteract . . . European assimilation . . . have themselves provided the cultural base and formative colonial experience on which European theorists have drawn in their apparent radicalisation of linguistic philosophy."

¹¹ "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" (1959) in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 29.

formative identifications, and generate a willingness to listen to the other. The work of mourning may, perhaps, follow. I am hesitant here, afraid of overstating my claim. Nevertheless, I emphasize the historical importance of Joyce's invention of a new way of writing which encrypts trauma into the text and traps the reader in an intense involvement. Although Joyce's work has haunted modernity, it seems its impact is still largely repressed – hence not heard and not worked through. My suggestion is that it will remain misread, enlisted in the service of transcendent truths or narcissistic play, unless we learn to receive and confront it in its sensuously embodied form as the “art of trauma.” Joyce's discursiveness, however funny, brilliant, and intellectualized his texts, ought not just solicit our complicity in his laughter, but also our tears and our witnessing testimony. Thus this book contains (and, I hope, demonstrates) an ethical appeal to read differently and read whole.

At issue, then, is a new notion of mimesis. This is neither the reifying *imitatio* of the specular copy critized by Derrida in “The Double Session,” nor is it the endlessly disseminating and performative self-inscription advocated by poststructuralism. Joyce's writing with “double dye” performs two activities at once, practising a cultural politics not couched in the traditional parameters of representation.¹² It answers Bhabha's question: “How does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity within the present? How does one then narrate the present as a form of contemporaneity that is always belated?”¹³ It inscribes the hollowness of the experience of the loss of linguistic interiority into the heart of the specular copy. It also projects a writerly subjectivity propelled by the historically traumatic nature of its inscription to self-dialectical repetition *as the only means of working this heritage out*. I call this a “mimesis of loss.” This self-dialectic, an ongoing process of self-conscious self-revision which keeps re-enacting the basic traumatic tension at ever more sophisticated levels, will eventually lead to the blatantly self-conscious but symptomatic writing of *Finnegans Wake*. Although the implied author never escapes the compulsion to repeat, albeit in incrementally complex and self-conscious

¹² See also David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), who addresses the inadequacy of traditional “forms of representational politics and aesthetics” for the understanding of Irish nationalism, and the need to “conceive of a cultural politics” “outside the terms of representation” (p. 89); and Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern “Ulysses”* (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1994), who argues that *Ulysses* “marks . . . a new episteme in what the Irish poet Seamus Heaney has described as ‘the government of the tongue’” (p. 4).

¹³ “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 308.

ways, I argue that his text testifies, beyond its knowing, to the unspeakable moment of destitution and repression.

Irish culture is deeply divided, even in its contemporary reactions to its colonial history. For centuries, culture in Ireland was, in fact, displaced English culture. Ireland was neither able to develop authentic modern forms of life nor to maintain the cultural and linguistic continuity of its Gaelic heritage. That traditional deadlock has not yet been fully overcome. Robert Welch, in a recent discussion, points out that, on the one hand, such a “traumatic reading” of Irish history is “catastrophic,” and “for that reason, satisfying.”¹⁴ It implies the admission that “something went wrong,” and lays the blame with the “English presence in Ireland.” The only remedy this vision sees is to discount all of its culture of the last centuries up to the last twenty years or so when Ireland began to join the mainstream of Anglo-American world culture:

The logic here leads to setting up the Irish language as the only sure icon of Irishness: everything else is pussyfooting and special pleading. We see writers like Alan Titley, Michael Hartnett and Nuala ní Dhomhnaill either explicitly or implicitly making this analysis and taking appropriate action. They write in Irish because no other language will do; no other language will convey, for them, those interior states of being that all writers who are real writers want to talk about. They experience the trauma of the fracturing of Irish culture and attempt the healing process in their own work and language. (2–3)

Seen as a “cataclysmic blow to the psyche of the Irish people in that it ripped out and tore asunder all the secret interiors,” the loss of the Irish language has given rise to a new form of writing in Irish which is marked by the intensity with which it addresses the entire question of language and representation itself. There is also the contrary reaction, however. Thus the “linguistic or cultural behaviourists” want to get on with modern life and enjoy capitalism. Forgetting the past, they just wish to build a successful new future – which is best done through writing in English.

The opposition sketched here, schematic as it is, would, at first, anachronistically, seem to place Joyce in the latter category of the writer who adopted the English language and made himself into a metropolitan, high-living, and world-famous success – sealed by the 1939 appearance of the cover of *Time* magazine. Indeed, this is the Joyce of the New Critics, of modernist scholars, even of such an ironic

¹⁴ Robert Welch, *Changing States: Transformations in Modern Irish Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

Joyce scholar as Hugh Kenner, all of whom place Joyce as an exemplary internationally oriented modernist genius. Even in such a historically sophisticated discussion of the development of Irish literature as Joep Leerssen's *Remembrance and Imagination*, Joyce's *Ulysses* is presented as the achieved attempt to overcome Irish isolation, "normalizing and calibrating the position of Dublin in space and time."¹⁵ It is not the Joyce I shall present. Though Joyce's drive to be modern and metropolitan is an incontrovertible fact, that appearance of modernity seems to me to have been a strategy to ensure the transmission of his work. Underneath that modernity, that work, I propose, participates in the sense of the traumatic nature of Irish experience of those who now write in Irish; but in a tragic mode, without its revivalist "dreamy dreams."¹⁶ The obsessiveness with which it addresses the entire question of representation and language, elevating it to a meta-level, points to its Irish provenance.¹⁷ Moreover, although in a different manner and with different intention, Joyce, too, inscribes Irishness into his work. Analyzed closely, his texts prove traumatically repetitive, "telling the old story afresh, like a needle stuck in the groove, in an uncanny, obsessive recycling process of the past," to use Leerssen's characterization of Irish discourse.¹⁸ The paradox is that Joyce, who was raised and educated in English and aspired to modernity, wrote *in* English, but with the continuous awareness of the sense of loss of the mother tongue, a loss which he enshrined in his texts. As I said, his experience of the English language, although that was his native tongue, was traversed by the split of its simultaneous "familiarity" and "foreignness." Joyce, who referred to his native country as "Irrland's split little pea" (*FW* 171.06), managed to inscribe this alienation and sense of loss into the English novel itself, to query our understanding of mimesis, and to make his Irishness a

¹⁵ *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork University Press, 1996), p. 230.

¹⁶ Joyce's words in the poem "The Holy Office" (1904), which defends his own poetics and points out the cathartic function his realism has for his countrymen involved in romantic idealization: "That they may dream their dreamy dreams/ I carry off their filthy streams." *James Joyce: Poems and Shorter Writings*, ed. Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz, and John Whittier-Ferguson (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 98. Hereafter *PSW*.

¹⁷ Note, for instance, his meeting with the young aspiring Irish writer Arthur Power. When the latter told Joyce that he aspired to write like "the French satirists," Joyce cautioned: "You will never do it . . . you are an Irishman and you must write in your own tradition. Borrowed styles are no good. You must write what is in your blood and not what is in your brain." Joyce countered Power's expressed wish to be international like the Russians with: "They were national first . . . and it was the intensity of their nationalism which made them international in the end, as in the case of Turgenev." Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and rev. edn. (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 505.

¹⁸ *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 156.

model for modernity. He did so at a moment in history when the English language, although the language of the oppressor, was certainly the language in which his “catastrophic” testimony would be most likely to be heard worldwide.

Here my epigraph with its reference to the Holocaust comes in. It needs commentary, because it might seem that, like a Benetton advertisement, I appropriate the misfortune of others to enhance my particular point. First of all, as I conclude in my final chapter, I see *Finnegans Wake* as a pedagogic attempt to inscribe racial darkness into western culture on the eve of World War II. Secondly, Joyce’s writing seems an “event,”¹⁹ a coming-into-historical-being, which permanently affected representation, just as “Auschwitz” permanently altered our understanding of the concept of history.

One might argue an analogy – however abstractly structural – between the Irish experience and that of the repression of the documentation verifying the historicity of the extermination camps, which is most clearly brought home by Lyotard’s discussion in *The Differend*. Lyotard is fascinated by “Auschwitz” as a deadlock of signification. Not only did the Germans exterminate the Jews, they also destroyed a large quantity of the records, the documents necessary for the validation of that fact. Lyotard proposes the following analogy. Suppose that during an earthquake all seismic instruments necessary to measure it were also destroyed. Should we then have to conclude that history has no means of establishing its occurrence? Though it cannot be quantitatively measured, it would still impress upon the survivors the overwhelming presence of the emotional force of the event. The experience would be recorded as a “feeling” “aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate. *Mutatis mutandis*, the silence that the crime of Auschwitz imposes upon the historian is a sign for the common person. Signs . . . are not referents to which are attached significations validatable under the cognitive regimen, they indicate that something which should be able to be put into phrases cannot be phrased in the accepted idioms.”²⁰ We can, I suggest, transpose this situation to Irish history. Though the autochthonous language, and with it the directly transmissible cultural memory of destitution, starvation, and slavery has been suppressed, that situation lives on in two ways: there is the sign of the absence of the

¹⁹ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81.

²⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1983; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 56–57.

language, and the non-figurable feeling, which travels through history divorced from a referent. In other words, the lapsing of the language – note how demonstratively Joyce resorts to the slip of the tongue – is a sign that something which ought to be or to have been expressed cannot (yet) be uttered discursively. Neither the revival of the Irish language – with its illusion that interiority has been regained by restoring the ancient speech, repressing the painful lapse in its own history – nor the turn to cosmopolitanism copes with, or addresses, the historical sign of the loss of the language and what that means: a muted history of suffering which works its effects on everyday life in the generation of nomadic affect disproportionate to the present occasion. Affect, no longer attached to story, no longer embodied as knowledge, hence no longer controllable, travels randomly like a will-o'-the-wisp.²¹ As I said, neither of the two contemporary choices formulated by Welch (to write in cosmopolitan English and become rich, or to write in the Gaelic language with a reclaimed interiority) attempts to articulate and address the *feeling* attending the historical suppression of cultural memory. Unless that experience is confronted and mourned, however, it will keep haunting the present. Even if there is no “story” to pass on, each succeeding present will be inhabited by its ghost until the crime is eventually worked through.

I suggest that Joyce’s *œuvre* is a “ghost story”: the location of the presence of that something not-expressed or inexpressible, that sense of loss transcending articulation, incarnated in his texts as the informative effect of a transcendent presence of absence, a matrix of negativity, a *chora* of loss, the black hole of muted history. Not only does it work its effect on Joyce’s textuality, Joyce also attempts to allegorize it, to make its presence felt, and give it a local habitation and a name – to make it controllable through figuration.

Important in Lyotard’s discussion is not only the question of finding language for what cannot be named. Especially relevant is Lyotard’s manner of referring to it. In Lyotard’s text the placename “Auschwitz” functions as the signifier for something prior to speech and declaration which has just been declared unnamable. He uses the geographical-historical name “Auschwitz” to fill in the void that gapes in history. But in choosing to take this signifier from the discourse of history to denote an unavowable loss prior to its discourse and declaration, he practises a secondary positivization of that unavowable moment. Lyotard discur-

²¹ On the place of affect in the “resistance” of transference repetition, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect* (Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 143.

sively re-materializes as placename the discursive death which inaugurates the condition of which the inception can never be given in its positivity but only pointed to as the unnamable moment of advent. This name thus functions as a substitute figuration for what cannot be named. As I shall argue in chapter 2, Joyce's realistic presentation of Dublin is to be understood like Lyotard's "Auschwitz" as a secondary positivization, a material substitute in the shape of the representation of a place and its people, offered to take the place of the story which happened there but which cannot be articulated directly.

In tandem with the forwardly propelling self-dialectic imposed by discursive trauma, the location, shape, and nature of Joyce's representation of the non-figurable shifts and self-consciously redoubles throughout his career. The ambition to articulate a meaning which is "still unuttered",²² begins when the young writer, ensconced in the sense of moral superiority of youth, intends to show his fellowmen their "hemiplegia of the will" in *Dubliners*. He hopes to create the "uncreated conscience of his race," the lacking "Irish soul."²³ Here Joyce understands representation as a neutral instrument, an objective mirror, independent of his writerly subjectivity, and he locates the trauma of Irishness outside the artistic self. As my discussion of *A Portrait of the Artist* will show, Joyce soon shifts the *locus* of the nonfigurable. If in *Dubliners* paralysis affected the object of representation, now it is related to the traumatically violent entry into subjectivity and naming of the artist-figure himself. This painful inscription has both a splitting and repetitive effect upon the text, setting up a repetitive internal dialectic, a continuous process of self-mirroring and self-correction which will continue throughout subsequent works, and which subverts the distinction between autobiography and fiction. Thus *Ulysses* splits the self and stages the asymptotic double quest of two protagonists (young-old; gentile-Jew; artist-citizen), and unravels the unity of the text into two gendered layers between which gazes the cold emptiness of "interstellar spaces."²⁴

²² *Stephen Hero*, ed. John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 73. Hereafter *SH* and cited by page number.

²³ Note that Joyce uses these words also to express his own intention in letters to the publisher Grant Richards and to his wife Nora. An early and important discussion of postcolonial Joyce was Seamus Deane, "Joyce and Nationalism," in Colin McCabe, ed. *James Joyce: New Perspectives* (Sussex: Harvester, 1982), pp. 168–84, which is closest to my own approach since it addresses Joyce's attempt to revise the medium of representation itself. Deane writes: Joyce's "[a]rt is itself in service to the Soul of Ireland. This soul is still uncreated. It is the function of true art to create it – a function all the more necessary since all other forms of Irish activity had failed by producing a debased version of that spiritual reality" (p. 172).

²⁴ Quotations from *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984), are indicated by episode and line number e.g. *U* 17.1246.

The darkness of unmeaning which *Ulysses* opens up is in turn staged in *Finnegans Wake* as the allegory of its own condition of impossibility. Joyce's career concludes with the blatantly demonstrative, heroic assumption of the dark stain of meaninglessness and racial denigration as the cross of *Finnegans Wake*. It blurs reality and dream and inhabits the inexpressible which is transmitted to the reader as ambivalent "feeling" (at once laughter and despair). Always arguing that "his shape" and his "destiny"²⁵ were those of Ireland herself, his career is the demonstration of the increasingly self-conscious, dialectical confrontation with the irrecoverability of the language of self-presence which has been lost, and the attempt to figure and articulate as presence what history only transmits as "feeling." Thus my reading of postcolonial Joyce is new, and perhaps to some disconcerting, because I locate his struggle with difference not as a theme in his work, nor as an attempt to redress injustice in representation, but at the more fundamental level of the transmission and figuration of an untold and untellable trauma which some might wish to forget *through* representation.

The analogy with Lyotard's discussion in *The Differend* is instructive in several ways. Firstly, he argues that "Auschwitz" is a moment when history must change its self-conception. Since most of the records are absent, it will have to learn to pay attention to the non-figurable, the "feeling," if it wants to do justice to what happened during World War II. Lyotard faces the possible counterclaim that history is not made of feelings, and that only facts establish truth, and points out that such historians do a "wrong" to the "sign that is this silence." Indeed, he claims that Auschwitz is so important in western history, because it inaugurates the event of something which can only be "sign" and not "fact" since "the testimonies which bore the traces of *here's* and *now's*" have been obliterated. It marks the end of historical knowledge as we have traditionally understood it. Now it is up to the historian, or the reader, to *understand* the situation in its "suffering of this abeyance [*cette souffrance*]." To do so, the historian must break with the monopoly over history granted to the cognitive regimen of phrases, and he or she must venture forth by lending his or her ear to "what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge."²⁶ Transposing Lyotard's argument to the "sign" of the absence of the Irish language in Joyce, we learn that the literary historian will have to lend his or her ear to "what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge."

Just as historians will have to learn to read differently after Auschwitz,

²⁵ Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (1934; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), p.152. ²⁶ Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 57.

I think the example of the “event” of Joyce is an injunction to learn to read literature in a new way. In order to bring out the truth or reality of what is present as absence or as lack, we must pay attention not so much to *what* is said, but to its *how* and to *what effect*. Moreover if, just as in psychoanalytic sessions, the meaning of signifiers is produced intersubjectively by the transferential context, part of the meaning of Joyce may reside in his *Wirkung* on the reader.²⁷ In short, we must relearn to hear, and literally see, what informs the text behind or between the words or beyond its words. Ideally, we shall become engaged in a dialogue of our own with the core of absence and trauma of Joyce’s text. Although it is *Finnegans Wake* which forces the reader into a witnessing attitude because it frustrates all attempts at making sense of it, all of Joyce’s major works demand this style of reading. In order to be true to the inexpressible in Joyce, we shall have to use our intuition and empathy in addition to our cognitive skills and our learning.

Thus another point argued by Lyotard proves of consequence. He suggests that henceforth the addressee, in our case we as readers, is implicated in the framework of communication. “That, in a phrase universe, the referent be situated as a sign has as a corollary that in this same universe the addressee is situated like someone who is affected, and that the sense is situated like an unresolved problem, an enigma perhaps, a mystery, or a paradox.” Here it is certainly worthwhile to turn to Lyotard’s text itself to note how he hesitates in using the word “feeling.” In whatever form or how we understand the aftermath of Irish experience as a “feeling,” the absence of the language “is the sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.”²⁸ Absence of language signals meaning left unarticulated which demands articulation: “The indetermination of meaning left in abeyance . . . , the extermination of what would allow them to be determined, the shadow of negation hollowing out reality to the point of making it dissipate, in a word, the wrong done to the victims that condemns them to silence – it is this, and not a state of mind, which calls upon unknown phrases to link onto the name of Auschwitz.” In short, we, the readers of Joyce, are asked to respond to the tacit demand in the

²⁷ Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” in Shoshana Felman, ed. *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982): “Reading here becomes not the cognitive observation of the text’s pluralistic meaning, but its ‘acting out.’ Indeed, it is not so much the critic who comprehends the text as the text that comprehends the critic. Comprehending its own criticism, the text, through its reading, orchestrates the critical disagreement as the performance and the ‘speech act’ of its own disharmony” (pp. 114–15). ²⁸ Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 57.

text, and articulate the meaning which is left “in abeyance.”

Although my perspective is more Lyotardian or Foucauldian than psychoanalytic, I use the term “trauma,” following Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth, to denote a presence which exceeds narrative discourse as traditionally understood. Though the term may, perhaps, carry a negative connotation of pathology, in trauma studies, as the theoretical field is now called, the concept of trauma is used to denote a structure of subjectivity split by the inaccessibility of part of its experience which cannot be remembered. Caruth speaks of the “fundamental enigma concerning the psyche’s relation to reality.”²⁹ In trauma, experience may be stored in the body without mediation of consciousness, and return as flashback, or keep insisting through a compulsion to repeat. The concept is important, because it forces us to rethink the relationship between consciousness, memory, and language.³⁰ It also links subjectivity to Lacan’s “real.” In Lacan, “the real” refers to that which cannot be directly inscribed or experienced, such as death or sexual difference, but which keeps insisting, and manifesting its presence through repetition. As Slavoj Žižek points out: “it is something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature.” Žižek also suggests that “this is precisely what defines the notion of traumatic event: a point of failure of symbolization, but at the same time never given in its positivity – it can be constructed only backwards, from its structural effects.”³¹

Trauma is thus a paradoxical structure, working by means of indirectness: it manifests itself through and as its consequences, its aftermath and effects, but is itself not directly accessible to consciousness or memory. It shows within the text of subjectivity what seems to remain outside it and what must be presupposed if all other elements are to retain their consistency. Freud called this situation “*Nachträglichkeit*,” the retroactive production of meaning. Thus trauma breaks up the forward movement of time, to inscribe metalepsis as a structuring principle. Finally, trauma is always the effect of a history, even if that history is not accessible to memory – a shocking event or situation which overwhelmed consciousness to inscribe itself as a death-in-life.

²⁹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 91.

³⁰ Note Ruth Leys’ definition of trauma as “the mimetic affection or identificatory dissociation of the ‘subject’ that occurs outside of, or prior to, the representational–spectatorial economy of repressed representations of the ‘subject–object’ distinction on which recollection depends.” “Traumatic Cures,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994), 644.

³¹ *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 169.

The importance of trauma in this study rests on the notion that trauma is always “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in its attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.”³² Speaking “beyond its knowing” of the impossibility of having its own history, the text of Joyce may work to “tell” us something about the incomprehensibility of Irish history which resists symbolization, even today. If we accept the peculiar temporal logic of trauma, which makes itself only evident in “another place, and in another time” owing to the latency inherent in its structure, we may also come to read Joyce’s works as the record and location of such a return of the unexpressed of Irish history as symptom. Moreover, Joyce’s texts may be understood as its incarnated vessel of preservation, if not transmission.

As a structure which manifests itself in its *Nachträglichkeit*, we can only know trauma through its effects. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I seek confirmation for my suggestion of the traumatic textuality of Joyce in both the extraordinary intensity of the response it has received, as well as in its curiously split nature. Joyce is named as an important influence or strong precursor by major writers from Borges to Rushdie.³³ He stimulated imitative productivity in several modern languages. Thus T. S. Eliot’s paradoxical conclusion that *Ulysses* is a “book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape,”³⁴ proved prophetic. Today, a search for Joyce’s *Ulysses* produces over ten-thousand hits on AltaVista; there are *Finnegans Wake* reading groups on several continents; almost more criticism is written about Joyce than about Shakespeare; and even recently a major Irish writer, referring to himself as a “survivor of Joyce,” figured Joyce as the “stone Nobodaddy at my shoulder,” the “great looming Easter Island effigy of the Father.”³⁵ Joyce is at once contagious and non-masterable.³⁶ On the

³² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.4.

³³ See, for instance, Ivo Vidan, “The Continuity of Joyce: Traces, Analogues in Later Foreign Writers,” in *International Perspectives on James Joyce*, ed. Gottlieb Gaier (New York: Whiston, 1986), and Morton P. Levitt, *Modernist Survivors: The Contemporary Novel in England, the United States, France and Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

³⁴ “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth,” *Dial* 75 (November 1923), 480-3, repr. in *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage, Volume 1: 1907-1927*, ed. Robert H. Deming (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 268.

³⁵ John Banville, “Survivors of Joyce,” in Augustine Martin, ed. *The Artist and the Labyrinth* (London: Ryan, 1990), pp. 73-74.

³⁶ See Roland McHugh’s *The Finnegans Wake Experience* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), for a personal account of an intense preoccupation with Joyce which changed a life.